



PUBLIC MEETINGS

THERE ARE various forms of public indoor meetings which in the main can be described under the following headings:

1. For demonstration and propaganda purposes only.
2. For publicity and recruitment of new members to an organisation.
3. For public protest against the action of a certain authority.
4. For obtaining public opinion by resolution in support of a certain project.
5. For the purpose of reporting on a certain event.

The reader will realise that there are distinct differences between these various kinds of meetings; and that therefore, the preparations, arrangements and management of the meetings also varies. The committee or organisation responsible for the meeting must prepare accordingly. '

PREPARATION FOR THE MEETING

Taking them in the numbered order mentioned above let us consider the characteristic features of each meeting.

Number 1. Specially attractive publicity intended to appeal to the widest section of possible supporters, Large hall, colourfully decorated. Popular speakers who have the ability of arousing strong enthusiasm amongst an audience. Inspiring music and song provided by orchestra or choir. Special attention to the stewarding of the meeting with adequate number of stewards to control crowds, to take tickets at doors, and to assist the Chairman in taking money collections. Arrangements should be made for supplies of literature and special sales stewards. At such a meeting no questions or discussion would be allowed.

Number 2. Special publicity efforts amongst those particular sections of people whom it is intended to recruit. For example, if it is a union meeting to recruit engineering workers then special efforts should be made, in addition to public notices in the local press and on the hoardings, to make the meeting known in the local engineering factories through printed leaflets distributed amongst the work-people by union members; by chalk notices at the factory gates; by contacting shop stewards and urging them to use their influence to rally the workers to attend the meeting. The speakers at the meeting should be fully qualified to speak about the work and policy of the particular organisation, and should in the main confine their remarks to that subject. There should be a plentiful supply of recruiting leaflets and membership forms, and for the benefit of those who do not fill up a form at the meeting the Chairman, in his closing remarks, should clearly indicate where and how such persons can make local contact with the organisation after they have reflected on the meeting and read the literature which has been given to them.

Number 3. In this case the publicity would focus attention on the grievance about which the protest meeting was being held. The speakers would build their speeches around that grievance and the audience would be asked to express support to the protest in the form of a resolution. It might elect a deputation to interview the Authority in question. It might decide on lines of activity for broadening and developing the campaign of protest until the grievance is remedied. If a deputation is to be elected a list of suitable names for recommendation to the meeting should be prepared, and other nominations left open to the meeting.

Number 4. At a meeting which is called to support a certain project like the "launching" of a new organisation or the organising of some special event, the publicity would centre around the objective. Well-known names of sponsors should be collected and advertised. They should be invited to sit on the platform although they might not be speaking at the meeting. The speakers should specially explain the project in view and what it is expected to achieve; A resolution should be drafted and submitted to the meeting for approval, and arrangements made to collect names and addresses of intending members and supporters. Provision might be made for questions and discussion from the audience.

Number 5. Reporting a special event such as a Congress, or the visit of a delegation to another country, makes a special appeal to studious-minded persons, therefore the publicity material should prominently refer to the event which is to be reported at the meeting. The speakers should be persons who have been connected with the event and who can therefore give a first-hand report of it. If there is more than one speaker they should, previous to the meeting, arrange their notes so that each speaker deals with separate aspects of the subject. At such a meeting as this it is absolutely essential that time be allowed for questions from the audience and replies by the speakers.

PROCEDURE AND CHAIRMANSHIP

Having broadly outlined the varying features of the different kinds of public meetings, now let us consider the general procedure which should apply to all of them, and some of the essential points in connection with the Chairman's duties.

First, a word about the meeting hall. The committee responsible for arranging the meeting should first make a rough estimation of how many people they expect to attract to the meeting, based upon the public interest in the subject of the meeting, the extent of the publicity campaign to be undertaken, and the attracting value of the speakers. They then have a reasonable idea of the size of the hall required. It is a mistake for them to book a large hall unless they feel confident about filling it. One hundred people in a hall which only holds one hundred, is a success, but two hundred people in a hall which holds eight hundred is a failure. The psychological effect on an audience where the hall is full is very important. It stimulates a feeling of strength, whereas a hall only half full has a depressing effect upon both the audience and the speakers.

But of course, it is possible for a committee to overestimate the attendance, and find on the night of the meeting, that not sufficient people turn up to fill the hall.

In this situation certain steps should be taken to minimise the effect of the poor attendance. First, if there is gallery in the hall, close that, and use only the ground floor. The people on the floor are not likely to notice an empty gallery. Secondly, try to get the audience in a compact position. Don't encourage the people as they arrive to stray into any isolated seat, have stewards to guide them to seats near to one another. Thirdly, if the seats are divided into a centre section and two sides, fill up the centre section first to within a few rows of the back, before starting to use the sides. A compact body of people in the centre block of seats, looking straight before them at the platform – over rows of filled seats – will hardly notice the empty side seats, or those empty behind them. Always fill the front centre seats. The sight of empty seats depresses an audience and discourages a speaker.

If representatives from the press have been invited to the meeting, or are expected to come as a result of the publicity, have a press table available for them near the platform to make it easier for them to take notes.

The Chairman and committee responsible for the meeting should be in attendance at the hall at least fifteen minutes before the starting time, so that they can meet – in an ante-room if possible – to review final details.

Speakers should also be present early and the Chairman should discuss the time-table of the meeting with them and any points he wants them to note about procedure, before they go on to the platform.

Some speakers – especially those who use carefully prepared notes – have a preference for either left or right of the Chairman's table, and the Chairman should ascertain this before-hand and try to accommodate that speaker in order to place him at his ease.

If it is a large platform, the committee and close supporters should be arranged as a platform party, to occupy seats behind the Chairman and speakers. A well-filled platform is much more impressive than an empty space.

Attention to the order of entry on to the platform is important. The Chairman should lead, the speakers should follow in their order of importance, and then the committee and supporters. On the Chairman's table there should be a bell or mallet and a water jug and glass. If there is a microphone it should be tested before the meeting opens to see that it is already switched on and is in working order. It is most disconcerting for the Chairman to start speaking into a dead "mike" and having to halt whilst somebody scurries around trying to get the apparatus to work.

When the platform party goes on, all of them, including the Chairman, should take their seats. The Chairman should then give the audience a few moments to settle down before he rings his bell or bangs his mallet to call for silence. He should then rise to his feet to make his opening statement, which should cover the objects of the meeting, the naming of the speakers and any reference to the meeting procedure on which he thinks the audience should be informed, such as whether time will be allowed for questions and discussion.

The Chairman's remarks should be terse and to the point. At a public meeting people come to hear the speakers, not the Chairman. He may be a more fluent speaker than the advertised speakers, but an audience always expects the Chairman to act as master of the ceremonies and not to play the part of a star performer. When the Chairman finishes his opening remarks he should then announce his first speaker. He should introduce him with a few appropriate remarks about his qualifications and his record of service in public life or whatever field of work he specialises in. Such remarks, commonly called a "build-up" – confirms the prestige of the speaker and prepares the audience for attentive listening.

The Chairman should have his time-table in front of him and he should quietly notify the speaker when he is nearing the time limit. This can be done by the Chairman touching his bell or passing a note to the speaker three or five minutes

before his time expires. The arrangement to do this should have been made with the speaker before he goes on the platform so that the speaker knows what to expect. The bell, as a signal, is less distracting to the speaker than the passing of a note. If the note method is used only two words in block capitals should be written, i.e., "THREE MINUTES". This notice can be read at a glance and gives the speaker time to make his closing remarks.

When the speaker sits down, the Chairman should not immediately rise to his feet, he should allow a few moments for applause. When the applause has ended he should then rise to make his next announcement. If there are more speakers to be heard he should announce them in turn with appropriate personal words of introduction. Although a speaker may be well-known, it is a mistake at public meetings for the Chairman to simply say, *"Our next speaker is so well-known that he needs no words of introduction from me."* The Chairman must not assume that everybody in the audience is as fully informed about the speaker's qualifications and record as he is himself. There may be many people present who only know the speaker by name and they will appreciate a proper introduction from the Chairman, providing it is short and to the point. Also, the words of introduction from the Chairman provides the audience with a few minutes necessary interval – or breathing space – between the two main speakers.

Further, when the Chairman has important announcements to make to the audience, he can effectively use the interval between the speakers to do so. It is a mistake to save important announcements for the very end of the meeting. When people are about to leave they are not so attentive to further remarks from the platform. Most regular meeting-goers have experienced occasions when these last-minute announcements have been shouted from the platform, above the noise of shuffling feet and conversation, as the audience is leaving the hall – and they know how ineffective such announcements are. It is the kind of untidy ending to the meeting which the Chairman should always avoid.

LITERATURE

Many Chairmen make that mistake in connection with literature. The sale of literature at public meetings is an important item and the Chairman can greatly assist this by devoting a few minutes to the subject in between the speakers. He should have copies of the literature on his table which he thinks the audience should be specially encouraged to purchase. He should briefly mention the importance of this literature and state the title and the price. If this announcement can be followed by a few minutes interval between speakers, to allow the literature stewards to go down the gangways to make sales amongst the audience it usually has good results. Those who do not obtain the literature because they are not

seated conveniently near the steward, will look for their opportunity to obtain it as they leave the hall. By the Chairman making an announcement about the literature, it gives authority to the sales – encourages the audience to buy, greatly helps the stewards to sell, and gives them a standing of importance to which they are entitled. If the Chairman makes no announcement, the audience streams out at the end of the meeting, with the less experienced meeting-goers regarding the literature stewards at the doorway almost as persons committing a nuisance.

INTERRUPTIONS

During the proceedings of the meeting the Chairman is responsible for maintaining good order amongst the audience. Serious interruptions very seldom occur at working-class meetings but when they do, if it is an organised attempt to break up the meeting and the Chairman is unable to stop it, he must rely upon the hall stewards to eject the interruptors. At public meetings it is always advisable to have stewards available for that purpose.

In the case of less serious interruptions a good Chairman can usually quell any disturbance. He has the advantage of his authority as Chairman and can, in almost every case, depend upon the support of the audience in checking interrupters.

Often, when interruptions take place they are provoked by some remark in the speaker's address, to which somebody in the audience objects. This is where the sense of judgement on the part of the Chairman must be exercised. If the interruption is no more than a single ejaculation the Chairman need not intervene. Usually the speaker, if he is quick-witted, will answer the remark of the interrupter in the next few sentences of his speech and if he does it well he will generally silence him. But if such interruptions are repeated, or if the interrupter rises to his feet and attempts to make a statement, the Chairman must deal with him. He should ask the speaker to stop for a few moments and resume his seat, whilst he rises to his feet to rebuke the interrupter. He should point out to the offender that he cannot permit such interruptions, that it is unfair to the speaker and to the audience who want to listen. The Chairman, by associating the audience with his ruling, rallies their support, strengthens his own authority and psychologically isolates and overwhelms the interrupter.

Another very effective method is for the speaker or Chairman to score with a quick humorous retort at the expense of the interrupter, thereby making him the object of laughter from the audience. This can be even more effective than the first method because it destroys the dignity of the interrupter. But the retort must not be ponderous – it must be spontaneous, quick and very pointed to be effective, and not every speaker or Chairman is temperamentally fitted for that.

RESOLUTIONS

At a public meeting where a Resolution is to be submitted for endorsement by the audience, the best practice is for the Chairman to read the Resolution at the end of his opening remarks and to call upon the first speaker to act as the mover and the next to act as seconder. If there are more speakers they act as supporters. At the end of the last speech before the Chairman makes his closing remarks the Resolution should be submitted to the vote of the meeting either by acclamation or by show of hands.

The committee responsible for the meeting may have decided that in addition to the platform speakers, discussion on the Resolution should be allowed from the audience for a limited period. Before asking for the first speaker from the audience, the Chairman should state the time which will be allowed for general discussion and then ask those in the audience who wish to speak to indicate by holding up their hands. That enables the Chairman to decide how much time he can allow to each speaker. If the total time for discussion is half an hour and six persons want to speak, he can allow them five minutes each. If, however, there are thirty or more would-be speakers the Chairman should rule that that number is not practical, and he should then fix a limit that he thinks is suitable and select the speakers in the order in which they rise and catch his eye. If he selects several speakers one after another who all speak for or against the Resolution, he should then ask if anyone wishes to express the opposite point of view, and if there is, he should give him preference to speak next.

In cases where provision has been made on the time-table of the meeting for discussion from the audience, it is necessary to make provision also for a short reply to the discussion by the first platform speaker who moved the Resolution, and immediately following this reply the Resolution should be submitted to the vote of the meeting.

VOTE OF THANKS

Often at public meetings, provision is made by the Chairman for votes of thanks to the speaker to be moved just before the close of the meeting. Especially is this done in the case of speakers who have travelled from outside the locality to the meeting, or if they are guest speakers from another organisation. It is a form of courtesy which makes a friendly conclusion to the meeting.

Often at small meetings, votes of thanks are moved without previous arrangement, but at larger public meetings – and if the Chairman intends to call for votes of thanks – it is advisable for him to arrange before the meeting who is to be the

mover and the seconder. This enables them to reflect upon a few suitable remarks and prevents some garrulous enthusiast jumping to the occasion and making an unnecessarily long statement.

Movers and seconders of votes of thanks must be very brief in their remarks – not longer than five minutes for the mover and three minutes for the seconder. They must not introduce new contentious matter in their remarks. They can refer to some of the points made by the speaker and express appreciation for his address and for the service which he has rendered. No discussion can be allowed by the Chairman on votes of thanks. After the usual applause from the audience to indicate support to the Motion, the Chairman should invite the speaker to make a brief reply.

CLOSING THE MEETING

The closing of the meeting is important from the stand-point of the impression left on the audience. The Chairman must aim at holding the attention of the Audience to the very last moment. He should rise to his feet for final remarks. These remarks should be brief and should refer to the outstanding purpose for which the meeting was organised. He should call upon the audience to bear in mind the speeches they have heard. If proposals for action have been put forward, the Chairman should briefly reiterate these and call upon the audience to go away determined to follow up these proposals; He should aim at terminating the meeting on a high note of enthusiasm. At the end of his closing remarks he should not just stop and leave the audience wondering whether there is anything more to wait for, he should definitely terminate the proceedings by saying, *"I now declare this meeting closed."*

PUBLIC DEBATES

PUBLIC DEBATES have a procedure which is quite distinct from that of an ordinary public meeting. At a debate the platform speakers are verbal opponents conducting a controversy before an audience and each endeavouring to convince the audience that his point of view is correct and the other one is wrong.

Usually only two speakers take part in a debate, but it is possible to have more and in that case they would be known as supporters to the two principals. Any controversial matter can be made the subject of debate, but it should always be presented in the form of a Motion. It should also be in the positive -not in the negative form. For example: *"That Socialism is the only permanent solution to unemployment..." "That the British prison system is in need of reform..." "That the present expenditure on the Armed Forces is against the national interest."*

Care should be taken in drafting the proposition which is to be debated, so that the point at issue is clearly evident, not only to the platform opponents, but also to the audience. For example, the following proposition is not clear, "*That nationalisation is not advisable.*" One might very well ask, nationalisation of what? and for whom is it not advisable? Surely it would be better to state the proposition in the following terms, "*That nationalisation of industry is a failure,*" or "*That nationalisation of industry is in the best interests of the nation.*"

For a debate there must be at least two speakers and a Chairman. If it is a debate organised by an established debating society the rules of that society will prescribe the procedure to be followed. But if it is a public debate arranged by individuals or by organisations other than debating societies, the procedure will have to be specially formulated and mutually agreed between the parties concerned.

The person who is to speak in favour of the proposition is known as the Opener, and he must speak first. The other one is known as the Opposer. The usual procedure is for each speaker to speak twice for an equal period of time and then for the Opener to close the debate with a few minutes' reply. The second period for each speaker would be shorter than the first.

If the meeting were to last two hours the arrangements would be something like the following:

Chairman's introductory remarks	minutes	8	minutes
Opener in debate		30	minutes
Opposer		30	minutes
<i>Second speech</i>			
Opener		15	minutes
Opposer		15	minutes
<i>Closing reply</i>			
Opener		7	minutes
Submitting Motion to vote of audience		3	minutes
Chairman's closing remarks		7	minutes

If votes of thanks were to be moved to the speakers, which is the usual custom in debates, about five minutes could be allowed for that before the closing remarks of the Chairman and that would make the above time-table exactly two hours.

The Chairman in opening the proceedings should welcome the audience, remark on the importance of the subject to be debated, introduce the speakers and refer to their qualifications, state the procedure laid down for the debate, read the Motion

for debate and then call on the Opener to speak. The Chairman is not entitled at any time during the proceedings to express his personal opinion for or against the Motion under debate, and he must be strictly impartial in his treatment of the speakers.

In addition to opening and closing the meeting the principal duty of the Chairman at a debate is to maintain order and see that the speakers do not exceed their allotted times.

Strict enforcement of the time limit for the speakers is absolutely essential in a debate. If the Chairman allows one of the speakers to exceed his allotted time he is acting unfairly to the other speaker and will almost certainly provoke protests from the speaker against whom he is offending and from his supporters in the audience. At a debate, both the speakers and the audience keep a check on the time, and any infringement is quickly noticed.

Before the debate opens, the Chairman should arrange with the speakers the signal which he will use when they are approaching their time limit. He should touch his bell or tap the table with his mallet two minutes before the limit is reached, as a warning that the speaker has that time in which to finish his speech. It is very important that the Chairman should explain in his opening remarks to the audience the signal arrangement which he will use, so that they also understand that the first signal is a time limit warning, and not a signal for the speaker to sit down. Failure to explain this might lead to protests from persons in the audience who have been closely watching the time.

When the two minutes' warning expires the Chairman must promptly give his second signal and that must be obeyed immediately, by the speaker resuming his seat. If the speaker continues to speak after the second signal the Chairman must rise to his feet and insist that the speaker sits down. Appeals from the speaker for "just a few more moments" must be firmly rejected by the Chairman.

The first speaker should carefully prepare his opening speech to cover the allotted time. But the Opposer should not prepare his first speech to cover the full time because, in addition to stating his case on the subject, he is, in fact, replying to the Opener and he should therefore leave himself time to answer some of the principal points made in the opening statement.

The second speeches of the contestants can be planned beforehand to bring out new weighty arguments, but in the main, the time should be used by each to demolish the case of the other.

Unless otherwise mutually decided, the Opener has the right to make a short closing statement. He therefore has an advantage over his opponent and the Opposer should remember this and try to avoid making statements in his second speech which the Opener can score from in his final remarks.

Immediately the final remarks of the Opener have been concluded the Chairman, without any further comment, must read the Motion again and submit it to the vote of the meeting. He then accordingly declares who is the winner in the debate.

If a vote of thanks is moved it should include both speakers but only the winner of the debate is entitled to reply. If the loser has made a good show the Chairman can, merely as an act of courtesy, invite him also to reply to the vote of thanks, but he is not entitled to claim it as a right.

When the speaker is replying to the vote of thanks it is courtesy for him to refer to the efficient and impartial manner in which the Chairman has conducted the proceedings and to ask the audience to express their appreciation to the Chairman by including him in the vote of thanks.

After the applause, the Chairman should then close the meeting with a few suitable remarks.

OUTDOOR MEETINGS

OUTDOOR MEETINGS are mainly organised for propaganda or protest purposes. There are two principal forms of such meetings, namely the street corner meeting where the audience is chiefly collected from passers-by, and the one which is an organised assembly, referred to as a demonstration, which takes the form of the crowd converging on the meeting place individually or in organised procession.

STREET CORNER MEETING

Let us first consider the procedure at the Street Corner Meeting. The platform is usually a small folding rostrum, a chair or a box, upon which only one person can stand at a time.

The chief function of the Chairman is to attract the audience and then hand the meeting over to the speaker. There is a technique about collecting "the crowd". The essential thing is to arouse curiosity amongst passers-by sufficient to cause them to stop to find out what the meeting is about. Unless a body of supporters are already assembled round the platform, the Chairman must rely upon building his audience

one by one as people come along. This often means that when he first gets up on the platform he must be prepared to talk to an open space. The tendency is – unless he is well-experienced in such meetings – for him to shout loudly in an effort to make himself heard-by persons whom he sees in the distance. In so doing he discourages them from coming close to the platform to find out what is going on, because they can hear all about it from a distance. In other words he is abating the curiosity which might draw them close enough to form a crowd. If they stop at all they remain at a distance and after a few moments, not feeling that they are part of the meeting, they wander away.

If the Chairman at a Street Corner Meeting will remember that he depends upon curiosity to collect his crowd he will not speak loudly, but quietly, so that the people have to come closer to hear what he is saying. Having come closer they feel that they are part of the meeting and are more likely to stay.

Often when a Street Corner Meeting is started there are half a dozen supporters already present, including the speaker and literature sellers. When the Chairman opens up, these supporters should not stand behind him but should get in front and form the nucleus of a crowd. Strangers are much more likely to come to the platform if they see others there. The stranger is reluctant to stand in front of the platform alone because he hesitates to make himself conspicuous.

A very effective method of drawing a crowd is for one of the supporters to interrupt the Chairman with questions or remarks which create the impression of opposition. It is a development of the curiosity trick which seldom fails to draw others in. The average person finds it difficult to resist listening to an argument between two or more persons and quite unconsciously he helps to form the crowd which the Chairman requires to make a meeting.

I remember a street-corner speaker in the days of mass unemployment who had a novel method of arousing curiosity for attracting a crowd to start his meeting. He would attract attention by simply rolling up a newspaper in the shape of a torch, setting fire to it and holding it in front of him whilst it burnt out. He would sometimes burn half a dozen newspapers one after the other without saying a word. Passers-by attracted by the strange spectacle would come closer to watch, then, when he had his crowd, he would say: "You saw me burn those newspapers, well I did so because they are hiding the truth from the people and I want to tell you about that." Having heightened their curiosity he would begin to address them about social conditions and accuse the newspaper editors of refusing to publish the facts. He charged them with deceiving their readers, but all this was only part of his introductory remarks, and as he talked on the crowd forgot about the newspapers and became interested in his general arguments about social conditions, whilst

newcomers helped to swell the crowd to a successful gathering. That was a simple form of showmanship which usually achieved its purpose because the average person is naturally curious.

I am not advising this method, I am simply quoting it to impress upon the Chairmen of Street Corner Meetings that they must bear in mind the part which curiosity plays in gathering an audience.

When the Chairman has collected his crowd he should announce the speaker and give him the usual build-up about ability and qualifications. At this stage he should ask the audience to close in to the platform so that the speaker does not have to strain his voice unnecessarily, and so that they can hear more distinctly what he has to say. People in a compact audience are less likely to stray away from the meeting. The Chairman, having done his job, then steps down and makes way for the speaker. From then on the speaker must depend upon his own ability to hold the crowd and secure an attentive hearing. If there are interruptions he must deal with them himself. He cannot keep stepping down to let the Chairman call for order.

Of course, if the interruptions are persistent and the speaker is unable to proceed with his address, the Chairman should ask the speaker to make way for him to appeal to the crowd. He should then appeal to their sense of fair play and inform them that if they will quietly listen to the speech they will be given the opportunity of putting their questions to the speaker as soon as he has finished. Unless it is an organised opposition, such an appeal from the Chairman – with the promise of questions – seldom fails to produce the desired results. The Chairman then steps down and the speaker resumes his address from where he left off.

When the speaker finishes, he should step down from the platform and the Chairman should then take over again for a few minutes to make any announcements necessary about literature and collection. He should then, without undue delay, call for questions to the speaker. When the first question is put, the Chairman should repeat it so that everybody in the audience can hear, and then immediately, call upon the speaker to mount the platform to reply.

If there is a hesitancy in the audience to start the questions the Chairman should give them encouragement by reminding them of some of the principal points in the speech and thereby help to give them ideas for questions. If he still has difficulty in getting the first question he can turn to one of his known supporters and say: "I have noticed that you listened very attentively to what the speaker had to say. Surely there is some point on which you would like further information?"

This prompting should produce a response from the supporter in the form of a question which might even have the appearance of challenging something which the speaker had said. The audience, in most cases, will think the questioner is one of them, and once the questions have been started they will lose their hesitancy and will follow up.

At a Street Corner Meeting it is not necessary for the subsequent questions to be put through the Chairman. They can be put direct to the speaker. The first question is put through the Chairman, but when the speaker has answered that he should remain on the platform and ask for the next question direct. Otherwise it means that the Chairman and speaker have to change over twice with each question, and that introduces a break in the proceedings and affords an opportunity to some of the audience to leave the meeting. To retain a standing audience in the open it is essential to hold their attention all the time.

Before the speaker replies to a question he should repeat it to the audience, because often those who are standing behind the questioner are unable to hear what he is saying. If some of the audience do not know what the speaker is replying to they will lose interest in the meeting and leave.

In replying to questions the speaker should make his reply to the crowd. He should not answer direct to the questioner because that will encourage him to interrupt the reply and result in a personal argument that will disturb the order of the proceedings.

Hecklers frequently crop up at Street Corner Meetings and often, without realising what they are doing, they turn a sparsely attended meeting into a mass gathering by the attention which they arouse from passers-by. The experienced Street Corner Speaker is not upset by their appearance – he welcomes them as a magnet for his crowd and a target for his wit.

It is most important when dealing with a Heckler for the speaker not to lose his temper. An irate speaker will lose the sympathy of the audience and play into the hands of the Heckler. If the speaker remains calm he will generally find that after a short time the crowd will turn on the Heckler and insist that he remains quiet or gets out of the meeting so that they can listen to the speaker without interruption.

Of course, the speaker who is clever at repartee can often make quick, humorous retorts to the Heckler which makes him the object of laughter from the crowd and drives him away from the meeting feeling very small. That is the most effective way of dealing with the Heckler.

When the time arrives for closing the meeting the speaker must step down and hand the meeting over to the Chairman. Before stepping down he should announce that the Chairman has something to say before the meeting closes. This helps to hold the crowd so that the Chairman can make his final remarks and formally declare the meeting closed.

OUTDOOR DEMONSTRATIONS

Now a few words about *Outdoor Demonstrations*.

Usually it is now the practice for loudspeaker apparatus to be used at these meetings. Many public speakers make the mistake of speaking too close to the microphone. This has the effect of distorting the reproduction through the loudspeakers and, although they produce a loud noise, their words are blurred and indistinct, with the result that the audience find it difficult to follow what they are saying. .

The crooner can hug the "mike" with satisfactory results because he is pouring into it a slow, treacly murmur, but speech – especially platform speeches – is a series of staccato utterances which reverberate on the microphone if the speaker is too close. Therefore if the speaker will remember just before he begins that he is not a crooner, he will do the right thing and stand back from the "mike" so that the audience gets a more perfect reproduction of his words. About twelve to eighteen inches away, according to the volume of the apparatus, is generally suitable for open-air speaking. If the speaker watches his audience he will know whether those at the back are able to hear him without any strain.

Frequently at Open-air Demonstrations the Committee responsible wishes to have a Resolution submitted. In this case the normal procedure in respect to Motions and Rules of Debate is dispensed with. The Resolution has already been formulated by the Committee and the Demonstration is simply asked to express its approval of that Resolution. No questions, discussion or Amendments are called for. The Chairman should read the Resolution at the beginning of the meeting and again at the end, before he submits it to the vote of the crowd. He should take the vote "for" and "against" the Resolution by a show of hands or acclamation. If he takes it by show of hands he does not require to count the vote, he simply declares it carried or lost according to the visible strength of voting.

CONFERENCES

A *Conference* is an assembly of delegates called together by a special committee or an established organisation, for the express purpose of discussion and decision. It may last one or more days and its procedure is generally much more complicated than that of a Public meeting. Therefore, a Conference is not the place for a novice to be in the chair. It requires a Chairman of experience who has a sound knowledge of the Rules of Debate.

In a Public meeting the audience is there mainly to listen to what is said without actively participating in the proceedings, but at a Conference everybody present has the responsibility of taking part in discussion and arriving at decisions. A Chairman who is not capable can cause serious confusion in a Conference, especially if the Agenda is a complicated and detailed one which involves alterations to the rules and constitution of the organisation concerned.

In addition to the ordinary Rules of Debate the Chairman must be fully conversant with any special rules which have been laid down for the conduct of business.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE

When a Conference is to be held, the organisation responsible for it usually appoints a Special Committee to attend to the arrangements and details. These will include the booking of the hall; the issuing of notices calling for delegates; the selection of stewards and doorkeepers; the seating accommodation and platform arrangements; invitations and facilities for Press representatives, and the printing of material necessary for the delegates.

The conduct of the proceedings is usually worked out by the Executive Committee of the organisation. This will involve the drafting of the Agenda and time-table; the formulation of Resolutions to be submitted; the selection of movers and seconders for Resolutions in the name of the Executive; the procedure for submitting Amendments; and the nomination of any Committees or Commissions which are considered necessary for operation during the Conference.

RESOLUTIONS

At a Conference the propositions for discussion which are printed on the agenda are nearly always under the title of Resolutions, not Motions. This is because they have already been discussed and resolved by the Executive Committee or one of the lower units of the organisation and are being submitted to the Conference for approval or rejection. If Amendments have been sent in for the agenda, they of course appear under that title against the appropriate Resolution.

CREDENTIALS

For Conferences, delegates must be issued with a special *Credential*. This should contain a perforated section on which the particulars of the delegate can be written or typed in. This section is given to the door steward by the delegate as he enters the Conference hall so that the organisation has a record of the delegates in attendance.

It is most essential that all stewards should be present at the hall before the doors are opened. They must see that every door is covered by one or more stewards, otherwise they will not be able to properly check the delegates' Credentials and prevent unauthorised persons from gaining admission.

CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

It is necessary to have a small committee known as a *Credentials Committee*, whose duty is to collect the Credential slips from the door stewards and compile a report on attendance and representation for presentation to the Conference before it closes.

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

At a Conference where there are numerous Resolutions and Amendments, it is essential to have a Special Committee which acts in an advisory capacity to the Chairman. It considers the Amendments to Resolutions and when, as frequently happens, two or more Amendments are similar in character, it interviews the delegates who are to move these Amendments, and either secures the withdrawal of the unnecessary repetitive Amendments or arranges for them to be coalesced into one composite Amendment. They also arrange which of the delegates concerned is to move and second such Amendment. In accordance with the changes which they are able to arrange they make proposals for adjusting the timetable for various items. Such committees are known under various titles, including *Standing Orders Committee*, *General Purposes Committee* and *Resolutions Committee*. They must of course keep the Chairman closely informed of any changes which they make, and this is usually done by one of the Committee submitting a factual report to the Conference on each separate item on the Agenda before it is reached by the Chairman. The Conference can either approve of the Committee's report or reject it. If it approves, the necessary adjustment in procedure is made by the Chairman. If it rejects the report the Committee must take the proposals back for reconsideration. But only in very exceptional circumstances does the Conference reject the Committee's proposals, because if

the delegates most closely concerned do not object, the others feel that they have no grounds to do so.

At political party Conferences there might have to be Special Commissions set up to function during the Conference on various aspects of policy about which statements have to be drawn up and submitted to the Conference.

The operation of Committees during the Conference therefore makes it necessary for those who are responsible for the preparation of the Conference to engage a hall which has suitable Committee rooms attached.

CHAIRING A CONFERENCE

At Conferences of more than one day's duration arrangements are sometimes made for different Chairmen to preside at each session. But the Chairman-in-chief is the one who opens the Conference and in the final session he takes over again and closes it.

In a Conference, the Chairman is always expected to deliver an opening address. This might be either an individual address or one which has previously been vetted by a Committee and is intended to express the collective opinion of that Committee. Which form it takes depends upon the rules of the organisation. In any case, only the Chairman of the opening session delivers an address. Any other Chairman who presides at subsequent sessions formally opens the session without a speech.

CONFERENCE PROCEDURE

The general rules and procedure for dealing with Resolutions, Amendments and other motions have already been considered and these apply in a Conference, except where rules of procedure drawn up by the organisation or Conference Committee state otherwise.

There are, however, a few special points that need mentioning here. First, on the question of speakers.

It is often claimed that the fairest method of selecting speakers from the floor of the hall is for the Chairman to point to the one who springs to his feet first and catches the Chairman's eye. But this claim is a very disputable one on a number of grounds. Firstly, if a large number of delegates in different parts of the hall are clamouring to speak it is difficult for the Chairman to decide who is the first. Secondly, the Chairman, although he is expected to be impartial in his choice, can quite easily avoid choosing a particular delegate whom he wants to exclude from

discussion because he knows him to be a critic. Thirdly, the quiet type of delegate is not so likely to compel attention from the Chairman as the noisy and aggressive one. Fourthly, the choice of speakers at random can result in a disproportionate selection in respect to representation or point of view.

Choosing the next speaker on the principle of catching the Chairman's eye may be a suitable method in a small Conference where unfairness can be more easily checked, but in a large Conference other methods are generally more satisfactory.

The alternative methods are: (1) That the names of speakers should be sent up to the Chairman written on a slip of paper and that the Chairman should call upon them in the order in which the names are received. (2) That the slips of paper containing the names of would-be speakers should be sent to the platform and that a small Committee should collect these and submit them in the form of a list for the Chairman to call upon. In both methods we must depend upon the Chairman or Committee to be unbiased in naming the speakers.

The Conference always likes to know the names and particulars of those who take part in discussion. Therefore if the method of catching-the-Chairman's eye is used in choosing speakers, the delegate who gets the floor should, before he commences to speak, announce his name, organisation, branch, or district that he is representing. .

When the name-on-the-slip method is used the Chairman is able to call upon the delegate by name and announce any other particulars which have been supplied. With this method it is a good practice for the Chairman to announce two speakers- the one who is about to speak and the one who is to follow. This enables the following-up speaker to be prepared for his call.

In a small Conference, delegates can speak from their place in the hall, but at a large Conference it is much better-for them to go to the platform so that everybody can see and hear them more clearly. Usually a rostrum is arranged for this purpose, which is at the side or in front of the platform, but a little lower. When the Chairman announces the name of the speaker in advance, it gives him notice to leave his seat and make his way forward to the rostrum in readiness for his call.

When a rostrum is used, the best method for signalling the time-limit to the speaker is by the use of electric lights fixed to the rostrum. The Chairman controls these from his table and when the speaker has two minutes to go the Chairman switches on a green light for a moment. When the two minutes are up he switches on a red light which means that the speaker must stop. The Conference is able to see these lights as well as the speaker and if the speaker ignores the Chairman's signal the

Conference will quickly indicate its disapproval by calling "Chair", until the speaker stops.

CLOSING A CONFERENCE

A final word about the closing of a Conference. The spirit in which it terminates its proceedings is very important and the responsibility for this rests with the Chairman. In the last session he must see to it that all officials and Committee members who are expected to be on the platform are in their places.

The Chairman is expected to make the final speech to the Conference. He should do so in the form of a summing-up on the work of the Conference and an exhortation to the delegates to follow up their decisions when they get back to their branches and districts.

He must hold the attention of the delegates to the very end and when he rises to make his closing speech he must aim at bringing the Conference to an end on a note of enthusiasm.

The delegates should not rise from their seats until he finally announces: "*I declare this Conference closed.*"

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